

A Family Alone – Chapter 24 – 40 Acres and...

“The land to the east between here and highway 41 is flatter. Maybe there.”

“Would some dynamite help you removing those stumps?”

“Would it ever.”

“There’s one box in the shed in the cabinet, I’ll unlock it for you. The fuse is there too, but the blasting caps are in another place. I’ll set out a box on the counter.”

“I can have all of the stumps out by fall. Will there be enough for the other land we clear?”

“I can get more.”

“Did you ever think of putting dynamite charges in that gully? They would serve the same purpose as landmines.”

“I hadn’t thought about it, but I suppose that I could do it if I could get electrical blasting caps.”

“If you can find them and enough dynamite, I’ll set the charges.”

Tom got with Dean a few days later and they headed to Visalia and points south to find dynamite and electrical blasting caps. Tom explained to Dean that Manny had suggested mining the gully with dynamite. Dean agreed that it was a very good idea. The only problem he foresaw was the possibility that someone might follow the gully to the point where it flattened out and ended. Tom allowed that it was a possibility but there was a limit to what they could do to protect the acreage. The solution might be to find 3 more families to occupy the 3 vacant trailers.

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“I have 5 cases of dynamite left, how many do you want?”

“That would depend on how much it costs.”

“There won’t be any more after these 5 cases are gone. I’m going to have to charge you double the pre-war rate.”

“Do you have blasting caps?”

“Electrical and fuse type, what do you want?”

“I’ll take both, would you accept gold to pay for everything?”

“Krugerrands or Maple Leafs?”

“Krugerrands.”

“I’ll take Krugerrands; I don’t much care for the Maple Leafs. The minute you touch them, they start to go down in value. I can give you \$1,500 an ounce. Two Krugerrands would buy out my entire stock of explosives.”

“Deal.”

“Damned expensive explosives, Tom.”

“\$544, Dean. I’ve had those Krugerrands for a long time.”

“That’s what I said, damned cheap explosives.”

When they got back to the drawbridge a pickup with a camper was parked. It was Dave, from Reno, with his family. Shelly had told him to wait until the men were back from their shopping trip.

“How did you find the place, Dave?”

“You gave me good directions, but I don’t suppose you remember. That was back when you bought the first M1A.”

“Come to the acreage. Shelly, lower the drawbridge.”

“Counterbalanced?”

“It used to take 180 pounds on the end of both arms. We added extra weight so Shelly and Sam could raise and lower it. Come on up to the house.”

“So we laid low until the radioactive fallout cleared. I decided to come here but when I looked at the map, I realized that I’d probably be going through Hawthorne, Nevada. Made a stop there and picked up some extra ammo.”

“How are you set for rifles?”

“I just had a shipment come in about the time the balloon went up. I hadn’t sold more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of them. I have several M16s and several more M1As. I had a fair number of magazines and I was able to pick up some ammo in Hawthorne. Hawthorne is a Tier II cadre site that maintains additional war reserve stocks. Tier II facilities store War Reserve ammunition to be used after the first 30 days. I sort of helped myself to the war reserves.”

“How much did you get?”

“A lot of 5.56 and 9mm. All we could carry. I see you have a lowboy for that semi-tractor. We could go back and get more. We could also pick up things I didn’t bring like 7.62×51mm and hand grenades. It’s just a shame they didn’t have weapons.”

“We picked up some dynamite today to mine the gully. You didn’t see any land mines, did you?”

“Sorry.”

“We have 3 empty mobile homes, Dave. We also have some people who need weapons. I loaned them a M1A and a M16, but maybe you could supply them with some.”

“Dad, there were some Beretta 92FSs in the Sheriff’s Armory. We don’t have anything that uses the 9mm ammo, otherwise.”

“Would they still be there?”

“Highly likely. Nobody liked them. There are magazines, too assuming the weapons are still there.”

“Why don’t Garry, Manny and you go find out?”

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“How many did you get?”

“Sixteen pistols, 80 magazines and the holsters and mag pouches.”

“I guess we’re set for the next war. I’ll help Manny put the charges in the gully. After that, he can finish clearing the stumps and plow 20 acres.”

“Why don’t we all help with the charges?” Dean asked. “We’d get done a lot sooner and be more secure.”

“How big of a charge do we need, Manny?”

“A half of stick ought to be enough. If we use a full stick, it might collapse the gully. This was all of the dynamite you could get, 5 cases?”

“It was all that the guy in Visalia had. If it’s not going to be enough, I suppose we can look for more.”

“I’ll make do, Tom. There is only one box of electrical caps in that carton of caps. We have plenty of wire if you can come up with more electrical caps later.”

“Maybe at one of the mines?” Dean suggested.

“It’s possible Dean, we’ll have to see. We’ll put in as many of the half sticks as we have caps and see if we need more.”

“I can already tell you that I could use one more box of caps for sure, Tom. Why don’t Dean and you go check out the mines? You might find more explosives, too.”

“Dean?”

“Let’s go. Someone lower the bridge. Tom, there are 18 mines in Fresno County and 8 in Madera County. We’ll probably find more explosives than we can use.”

“Let’s hope so, Dean. Except for blowing stumps, I prefer not to have to use any of the explosives. The damned world has gone crazy. We’ve just been lucky so far. I figured we’d have a lot of people in the area because of Yosemite.”

“That’s a large park. It will probably overflow sooner or later. It will give us time to get our preps in order. It would be nice if we had more propane. I know we have a lot, but now we’re supplying propane to 8 homes.”

“They had two large tanks were we got the propane, wasn’t of them nearly empty?”

“That tank in Mammoth Lakes? Yes it was close to empty. What do you have in mind?”

“If we could finish emptying it, possibly we could find a crane and load it onto the lowboy for transport back here. We could set it in place and haul the fuel from the other tank. When it was empty, we could transport it too. I think that there are several AmeriGas locations around maybe we could end up with a total of 66,000-gallons of propane. It would take 10 loads to empty the fuller tank and another 10 to fill the second tank, but that would be enough propane for years.”

“That would let everyone run their propane furnaces in an emergency or when the wood stoves weren’t putting out enough heat. We’ll have to find gas pipe. I’ll ask Rob or Shelly.”

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Population:

01. Tom and April Henson (2) Owners
02. Dean and Avis Owens (2) Co-owners
03. Garry and Samantha Owens, Paul, Caroline and Laura (5) Mechanical
04. Rob and Shelly Henson, Greg, David and April (5) Medical
05. Manny and Salina Cortez, Paulo and Maria (4) Agricultural

06. Dave and Mary Williams, Kelly and Amy (4) Firearms

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The older adults were all between the ages of 45 and 50. Dave and Mary had married late, around age 30. Dave had been in the Army with Tom, around the time that Tom had gotten hurt and was 45. Dean was older than Tom having reached middle age, 50. The fall of 2017 saw 22 people living on the acreage and 2 empty mobile homes. Tom and Dean cleaned out the explosives at the mines in Madera County that had explosives. Most of the caps they found were electrical blasting caps and they found one spool of det cord. Manny used a full case of dynamite in the gully now that he had extra blasting caps and the detonators. He made short work of the stumps and had the land plowed before the first snowfall with came early in 2017. It wasn't a lot of snow, in keeping with predictions. Consequently the roads stayed open.

The gate on highway 41 was closed but not locked. They sat Dave's travel trailer up at the bridge so someone could keep an eye on the bridge. One of the TS-2000s was installed in the trailer and spare antennas erected so whoever was on watch could notify the house. Often the duty fell to Kelly and Amy. They weren't big enough to lower the bridge if they wanted to. The 8 horses that Dean and Tom owned were mares so Rob's stallion was used to breed them. The 3 cows calved and they got 2 males and a female. The gestation period on a horse is 320 - 345 days and a mare, which has just foaled, will normally start cycling about 6 days after she has foaled. Some mares could range up to 18 days and some mares don't have a foal heat. It varies on a cow, depending on the breed. These cattle had a gestation period of 283 days. Traditionally, calves have been weaned at 7 to 8 months of age. However, if nutrition and management are adequate, calves can be weaned at much younger ages and with a number of advantages.

Well-fed, mature cows normally show first estrus (heat) about 55-65 days after calving. Since the gestation period is about 283 days, a cow must have been in heat, bred and pregnant by 80-85 days after calving or she can't calve every 12 months. Cows in poor body condition, cows losing weight due to inadequate nutrition, heavy milking cows and particularly first calf heifers calving, as 2-year-olds do not usually cycle before 85 days after calving, resulting in late-calving or open cows. Angus cows are known for their inherent mothering ability and calf-rearing tendencies. The breed's superior milking ability and udder soundness, coupled with good fertility and temperament traits common to the breed, make Angus females' ideal mothers.

Plus, with moderate size and an efficient frame, Angus females mature early, breed back quickly and have comparatively short gestation periods. In an industry that depends on reproductive performance, it's important to get young cows to calve early and rebreed on time.

"Anything else you need to know?" Manny asked.

A Family Alone – Chapter 25 – Processing Meat

“Yeah, can you ride a horse?”

“Like I was born in a saddle, boss man.”

EDC - Anticipated due date for delivery of the baby. Calculated from the first day of the last period counting forward 280 days. So, from the moment of conception, the term is 280-14-7 or 260 days, give or take. One source put it at 266 days.

Now they really had a problem. With 10 mares bred, they didn't have enough horse stalls in the two barns. It would be okay for a while, but eventually they have to have more room. Dean had originally looked at a covered corral when he was considering putting in a barn. They could get their own poles from the lodge pole pines and all they would need is lumber and roofing materials. Why not use the remaining flexible thin film PV roofing for the corral roof? I would mean locating extra panels if they didn't have enough and a lot more batteries, but if the corral roof were flat, it would generate a lot of electricity. And, if they had enough panels, perhaps they could erect two canted platforms to point the panels toward the south at ~ a 30° angle. By lumber I'm referring to plywood. However, Tom had that attachment for his chainsaw so if they couldn't come up with any, they could saw planks. They would still need tarpaper and tar to put under the flexible thin film PV roofing.

“My goodness, we're going to have a herd of crying babies, cattle and fillies and colts. I may have to hide in the shelter to get away from the noise.”

“You forgot the hogs, they're bred too.”

“Who's on first?”

“The pigs, 114 days; then the kids and the cows, followed by the horses.”

“We'll need a smoke house and hardwood to smoke the bacon and hams.”

“We can use hickory chips; it will be easier than finding a tree.”

“We're going to need someone who knows how to butcher the hogs and cattle and cut the meat.”

“Then you had better get looking, Tom, you only have about 3 months to find someone.”

“Right, April, I'll run an ad in the Fresno Bee.”

“What's bothering you?”

“I guess I’m just feeling overwhelmed. We had it so peaceful here in the country. Now the acreage is an armed camp behind a drawbridge and dynamite mines. Come spring, Dean and I are going to move those propane tanks from Mammoth Lake and we’ll have two tanks containing 60,000-gallons of explosive gas. Then there are those Chevron tankers and a bullet could explode one of them too if we ever got into a firefight with some MZBs.”

“MZBs?”

“Mutant Zombie Bikers, bad guys. I read it in a story when we still had an Internet.”
(Most real survivalists go to this website; or did until the owner removed the Patriot Fiction from his website. His choice but with the internet gone, it no longer mattered.)

“Ask Dean, he might know someone.”

“To do what?”

“Cut the meat.”

“Right, I knew that’s what you meant.”

“Dean, do you know any meat cutters?”

“I know a lot of them Tom.”

“That isn’t what I meant, Dean; do you know where we can find a meat cutter?”

“In a grocery store? We could try advertising.”

“They aren’t publishing the paper.”

“No, but there is a bulletin board up in Fresno at Sheriff’s Department where people post messages. There is also one up in Madera at the Sheriff’s Department.”

“April suggested that we smoke the hams and bacon with hickory chips.”

“I think that might work, but we’ll have to build a smokehouse. I’ll get Manny to saw some planks. Those pigs are growing like weeds.”

“Dean I don’t know much about smoking meat but I printed out some plans for a smoker made from an old refrigerator. ‘Electric cold smoker: find an old refrigerator. Remove the innards – all the innards. The fridge you use should have metal shelving rather than plastic. Poke a hole about 1.5 inches in diameter in the top. There should be a hole in the back, bottom about the same size where some of the wires/piping etc. came out. Using an old beer can or some sheet metal and self-tapping screws, mount a sliding flap over each hole so you can control the airflow. Buy a single burner electric hotplate,

and a small cast-iron skillet. Go to Costco or Sam's or your neighborhood fishing supply store and buy a box of Little Chief Smoker smoking wood sawdust. Mount the hotplate in the bottom of the old fridge, put the skillet on top of the hotplate, run the cord out a hole in the side or back, plug it in, turn it on medium low, fill the skillet with the sawdust, pellets or wood chunks. Put your smoking meat on the metal shelves, (that you've cleaned really good, first) close the door. Every 3-4 hours refill the skillet. Do this for 12, 18 or 24 hours, until the meat is smoked.' What do you think about making one of those? It might be easier than building a smokehouse."

"All we would need is a refrigerator with the freezer on the bottom. There should be plenty of those sitting around in abandoned houses. We could go to Fresno and look. There won't be many people, seeing how cold it is."

"We might not have to smell the bodies either."

"I hadn't thought about that. Now would be a very good time to go. We'd better all go in case we run into trouble. I'll go get Manny from the woods."

"Maybe we can pick up some hickory saw dust or chips like that article recommended."

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"How do we cure the meat?"

"Dean I have the recipe from the place where I learned about the refrigerator smoker. 'To each 50 lbs of salt, mix about 4 pounds of molasses (blackstrap if you have it), about 1 pound of black pepper, about 4 oz. of paprika and about 2 oz. of red pepper or cayenne. I use molasses rather than brown sugar so that the mixture can be packed around the meat. Color should be light brown and texture should be friable: it should pack when squeezed in the hand but fall apart when poked; like good loam soil ready to be plowed. Proportions are not critical and you can add whatever dry spices sound good. Just mix and dump until you have a mixture that looks like it will cure pork! Back when hog killing was the norm, everyone had their own mixture. Some used plain salt or salt and pepper; others added refined sugar, brown sugar, or molasses and so forth. You can add some saltpeter or Prague powder for added safety if you want to. I have never used it and have no idea how much to put in. If you have no sense of adventure, buy Morton's Sugar Cure.

"Spread a ½-inch layer of cure on the bench, place meat skin side down and cover all surfaces with about ½ inch of cure. Force cure into the cut shank ends of hams and shoulders. I prefer laying all of the pieces out separately so I can see when cure gets thin, but you can pile it all up and overhaul more often. During the phase of rapid cure uptake, a lot of fluid is drawn from the meat. That is why you use rough wooden benches with the planks not too tight – dirt floors help too. Of course, never use treated wood in contact with food. Check the meat every few days at first then not as often as salt absorption decreases. Overhaul several times by moving the pieces around, making sure

they are covered with cure (it won't stick to the dry skin on hams so don't worry about it). Hams and shoulders stay in cure for about 2 days per pound."

"Now what?"

"I guess we wait and see if we get a reply to the notices we put up on the bulletin boards."

"When did you want to go to Nevada?"

"Hawthorne?"

"Is that where Dave was talking about?"

"Yes, the Army and Marine Corps Facility in Hawthorne, Nevada."

"Well, we have 6 days until we need to check and see if there is any response to our notices for a butcher. How about we go now?"

"Suits me, I'll go ask Dave how far it is."

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"Two hundred miles from Hawthorne to your bridge. It's the same way you always came to Reno except you take 167 just north of Lee Vining. Do you want to go now?"

"We posted a notice for a butcher and have 6 days before we have to go to town and see if we got any response. It probably would be a good idea to get there before someone else comes in and cleans the place out."

"We should be able to get there in about 4 hours. It depends on the road through Yosemite. Figure 4 hours to find what we want and load it and 4 hours home. We should be back by midnight. Who are we taking along?"

"All of the adult men, Dave. After that little misadventure when I got shot, I don't want to go anywhere where there could be trouble without Rob along. I think 6 of us can crowd into the cab and sleeper."

"Is there a radio in the semi?"

"I put one of our TS-2000s in there. I took the one out of Sam's pickup for your trailer and the one out of Rob's pickup for the semi."

"Have you decided what you want?"

"5.56, 7.62, .45ACP and grenades. You brought more 9mm than we'll probably ever use."

"If I may make a suggestion, we should get whatever we can find. We might be able to get some military weapons from an armory. We can prioritize it, but we might find a Ma Deuce or something in one of those armories."

"You don't have any M203s for the M16s, do you?"

"No, but there were 40mm grenades in Hawthorne and again, we might find some in an armory."

"We have a closed trailer available."

"It might be wiser to use it and not advertise what we have."

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"Is that smoke coming from the craters at Mono Lake?"

"It looks like it. Doesn't look like very much, though. I haven't felt any earthquakes, have you?"

"No. I'd better radio April and tell her that there is some minor activity."

"Didn't I read somewhere that there is a minor eruption about every 250 years? That's what this could be. We'll be in Hawthorne in about 2 hours. You let her know about it and we'll try to hurry a little when we get there. I know where most of the different types of ammo are stored."

"That bunker there is 5.56 non-belted. The next one over is 5.56 belted. They just keep moving up in size and alternating between non-belted and belted. The grenades are in that far bunker and the 40mm stuff in the bunker next to it. The .50 cal stuff is on the other side of the road, same arrangement, belted in the first bunker and non-belted in the second. There are pallet jacks in each bunker. We can back the truck up to that loading dock over there and drag the pallets to the trailer."

"That went well, 3 hours to load the truck. It will get us home at 11pm."

"When we get closer, I'll give April a call and tell her when to expect us. I wonder if that little cinder cone at Mono Lake is still acting up?"

A Family Alone – Chapter 26 – Meat Cutter

“Even if it is, it shouldn’t be a problem. If Mammoth Mountain were acting up, I think I’d be concerned. I didn’t see any smoke in that direction when I looked.”

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“See, just a few sparks. About what it was doing when we went up earlier.”

“April, this is Tom, come back.”

“Where are you?”

“Near Lee Vining. The cinder cone at Mono Lake doesn’t seem to have any more activity now than when we came up this morning.”

“10-4. We haven’t felt any earthquakes. How did you do where you went?”

“We filled the trailer. We’re traveling a little slower than on our way up, but we should be there by 11.”

“Any trouble?”

“Negative. How about you?”

“None here.”

“Clear.”

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“Aren’t you supposed to use call signs?”

“Yes, Dave you are. But anyone with a call sign book could look up the call sign. What’s the government going to do, arrest us? Most of the people on the air aren’t hams anyway these days.”

“What are our choices on weapons?”

“Either Fresno ANG, Lemoore NAS, Camp Roberts or Fort Hunter-Liggett.”

“What is the closest besides Fresno?”

“NAS Lemoore.”

“We’ll try there tomorrow. What else is close?”

“Camp Roberts.”

“Dave, Camp Roberts had most of the Cal Guard’s shooting ranges. Lemoore is likely to still have Naval Forces and Marines, regardless of what happened. The Navy transferred its equipment and units from NAS Miramar to Lemoore.”

“Like I said, Tom, Camp Roberts.”

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One can speculate as to Dave’s thinking. Since the facility in Fresno was at the airport, the odds favored it having been well picked over or destroyed. If NAS Lemoore was an active Naval and Marine Corps installation, it might have been hit. If not, there were probably a few Marines around. On the other hand, the state of California wasn’t likely to have its people at Camp Roberts, training. Why train when they had lots of the real stuff to practice on? Roberts was likely to have ammo, if not weapons. Now that the subject has come up, where in the hell was the CNG anyway? The CNG was probably in Sacramento, San Francisco and Los Angeles, e.g., the capitol and the biggest cities.

The next morning, they headed to Camp Roberts, which was just north of Paso Robles on US 101. Paso Robles was near the southern end of state route 41. They could pick up state route 46 off of 41 and take it into Paso Robles and then US 101 north to Camp Roberts. Good guess, there was no one on the post. They hadn’t taken time to unload the trailer and had the lowboy. They brought back 2 M2A3 Bradley IFVs, several 5.56 and 7.62 caliber machine guns, 4 of the M2HB machine guns with tripods, M16A2s plus and all of the other ammo they could carry. The CNG wouldn’t need Bradley’s because they were in the US, not Iraq.

“Where do you want to station the Bradley’s?”

“How about here on the acreage just on the inside of that row of pine trees?”

“Fine. Make sure they’re ready to go.”

“Gotcha.”

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“What’s your experience?”

“I worked at Miller’s in Hyrum, Utah preparing packaged beef products. Got laid off there and moved to Los Angeles. Worked for Clougherty Packing Company for a while, that’s the Farmer John brand. Then we moved to Fresno and I cut meat for Costco.”

“Are you a Mormon?”

“Is that a problem?”

“No, most of us are Lutherans, but we have two Catholic families. All we have for Church services is a non-denominational meeting on Sunday mornings.”

“Doesn’t bother me if it doesn’t bother you.”

“How large is your family? All we have available are some 16’x84’ mobile homes for housing.”

“Sarah and I have 3 children. That ought to be big enough. What do you have for equipment to process meat? Do you have a walk in cooler, meat saws or anything?”

“About all we have are live animals, Jacob.”

“Are you any relation to Brigham?”

“Oh, the last name? It’s possible, but I don’t think so. I came to Utah from the Midwest, Nebraska. Started out at IBP.”

“Would you and your family be interested in moving to our acreage?”

“What’s the offer?”

“Housing, food, weapons if you need them, and work. We have a herd of hogs, a boar and 3 sows, some cattle and are looking for poultry. We need the livestock butchered, processed and packaged.”

“I probably don’t need any weapons; I have some of my own. I have an idea where you might get poultry. We’d need to get the stainless steel tables, meat saws and knives from Costco; they’re just sitting there. I’d need a place to work and you really should have a walk-in cooler to age the meat and store it until I can cut it up. Do you have a smokehouse?”

“We converted a refrigerator.”

“That’s probably not big enough. It takes a while to cure the bacon and hams. Costco sold butcher paper so we can get that there. Do you pay wages?”

“Nominal wages. You won’t need much. Most of your compensation would be the housing and the food. Don’t forget the security, Jacob. We’re off the beaten path and have made some preparations.”

“Sarah said it was up to me. Ok, fellas, you have a deal. Do you have any way to move the things from Costco?”

“We have a semi-tractor and two trailers, will that do?”

“Probably. I wonder if we could move the cooler from Costco? Do you have a place to set it?”

“We’ll find a place. Welcome Jacob. What are your children’s names and ages?”

“Jacob is 16, Robert is 15 and Sarah is 12. Why?”

“We have a couple of teenage girls at the place, 15 and 14.”

“We have our belongings, or what’s left of them, ready to go. When can we come out to your place?”

“Is tomorrow too soon?”

Add: 7. Jacob and Sarah Young, Jacob (16), Robert (15) and Sarah (12), (5) LDS

It was easy to get most of the things they needed from a gutted Costco. The only real problem they had was moving the cooler because it was big and heavy. The cooler became the focal point of the slaughtering operation. Once it was set in place and operating, they build a small building around it, using the cooler as one corner. It turned out that in his career; Jake had done a bit of everything in the meat packing business so he knew how to do what they needed done. Jacob hooked them up with a fellow who had some chickens.

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“I was sleeping pretty well until that damned rooster started crowing. It used to be so quiet out here in the foothills. It’s turned into a damned city.”

“There is safety in numbers, Tom. Besides, we only have one unused trailer so we’ll only be adding one more family. Manny did well this winter, under his tutelage they managed to clear 5 more acres and put up a lot of lumber and firewood. Did you run out of electrical panels?”

“The last of them went on the roof of the covered corral, April. We ended up putting the batteries in two stalls in the barn. I think we solved the problem with the tankers and the LP tanks. The tanks are in a trench and the trailers are behind the berm we built using the dirt. If anyone attacks the place, I doubt we’re going to explode.”

“It appears that your arm is fully healed. You aren’t even going to have much of a scar. Rob said that Shelly definitely is carrying twins. When does the butchering begin?”

“Probably about November. Do we have enough meat to tide us over?”

“Yes, even with all of the people we have now. I’ve been getting quite the workout baking bread for everyone. My limit is about 12 loaves a day. Do you think you could find me any more of those loaf pans?”

“We can look. How do you manage 12 loaves? The most you every baked before was 6.”

“I start early in the morning and do the first batch. When I put those 6 in the oven, I start another batch. The second batch goes in the oven during the afternoon and voila, 12 loaves.”

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“Tom we have trouble at the bridge.”

“Who is on guard up there?”

“Jacob and Robert. They said over the radio that there were several vehicles.”

“Get everyone except the expectant mothers into the two Bradley’s and let’s go see what’s going down.”

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“This is a private road. What can we do for you?”

“We’re hungry. What are those, tanks?”

“Close enough. How many of you are there?”

“What you see, man. It don’t look like there are many of you.”

“We get by. Where are you from, Fresno?”

“Nah, San Francisco. We gonna stand here all day and talk?”

“Possibly. Can you pay for food?”

The group was about 20 strong, mostly people in their late teens or early 20’s. There were about 12-14 men and the rest were women, or girls. The men were brandishing weapons, an assortment of rifles, shotguns, revolvers and pistols. They were positively filthy and looked like they hadn’t bathed since the attack. Tom’s immediate assessment was it was a band of punks. Dean leaned over and suggested about the same thing Tom was thinking: “this group is nothing but trouble.”

A Family Alone – Chapter 27 – Trading Partners

“Dave, what do you think?”

“Shoot them and be done with it.”

“We could possibly trade some food to you, what do you have?”

“We have some gold and silver.”

“Coins?”

“Nah, jewelry and like that.”

“I don’t like the sounds of that,” Dave murmured.

“Me either,” Dean added.

“I’m sorry, but we can’t eat jewelry. We don’t really have that much food anyway. I’m afraid that we can’t help you.”

The people ended up being trading partners in the end... trading lead. The apparent leader of the group waived his arm and said, “Take ‘em.” The M242 25mm “Bushmaster” Chain Guns opened up on the attackers. It was all over in the blink of an eye.

“Lower the walking bridge. Rob get your medical kit, we might have some wounded.”

“Man do those cannons, make a mess or what?”

“They’re intended for vehicles, Dean. People aren’t much of a problem. Rob, are any of them alive?”

“I have 1 dead female and 5 wounded. All of the men are past my help.”

“Are any of them well enough to talk?”

“I’ll send this young lady over, Dad, she’s not badly hurt.”

“What is your name?”

“Janet Barlow. Thanks mister, the 6 of us were prisoners. We were from Tracy. A few weeks back these men and a bunch more hit part of the town. They killed a lot of people but the townspeople drove them off. That didn’t do the 6 of us any good. We were in Church getting things around for a wedding. They grabbed us and... well, you know.”

“Raped?”

“And worse. I don’t think I’ll ever feel clean again.”

“Are you hungry Janet?”

“We haven’t eaten in several days. This bunch tried to attack a group in Yosemite and was run off there too. They only gave us their leftovers.”

“We’ll get you cleaned up, fed and see about getting you back to Tracy, Janet. Garry, could you check the vehicles and see what condition they’re in?”

“I already did, Tom, they’re toast. We can siphon the fuel and tow them. None of them will run.”

“Tow them up to the highway and leave them just inside the gate. Rob, what’s the situation?”

“I lost another one Dad. The other 3 will be ok once I get them patched up a little.”

“How long before we can get them back to Tracy?”

“At least a week.”

“I’ll get the tractor and bury the bodies,” Manny offered.

“I’ll get the guns and ammo,” Dave added.

o

“We might not be so lucky the next time, you know. They didn’t really have much in the way of firepower. If we go up against some people who cleaned out an armory, it might be a different story.”

“While we’re in Tracy, we ought to check out the Defense Logistics Facility.”

The facility in Tracy mostly dealt in perishable foods. However, they came away with several items in short supply, like sugar, flour, coffee, etc. Janet and the other 3 women were taken home when they’d healed sufficiently. Tracy had roadblocks set up, so Janet and the others got out of the vehicle and explained what happened. The folks from Hildreth were allowed access to the Logistics facility by the grateful residents. These folks became their trading partners. In and around Tracy were several food plants, including Holly Sugar. That area of the San Joaquin Valley had about 500,000 acres under cultivation before the war.

They were able to buy 2 steers that were fat and ready to butcher so Jacob now had some fresh meat to work with. It would be early winter before their pigs and cattle were

big enough to butcher. When that happened, most would have to participate; it would be a lot of work. Manny buried the bodies up by the road and stuck in homemade crosses, 16 of them. Perhaps this would serve as a warning for the next group that thought about turning down that road leading to the acreage.

It wasn't a bad setup, two permanent homes and 6 mobile homes, 5 occupied. Two barns each capable of holding 8 horses less 2 for the stalls occupied by the battery racks and a roofed corral to protect the livestock from the elements. There were 2 30,000-gallon propane tanks set in trenches, 2 3,000-gallon (net) propane tanks, 1 18,000-gallon 4 compartment underground tank of stabilized diesel, a 500-gallon underground tank of stabilized gasoline, 24,000 gallons of stabilized diesel fuel in tankers plus 8,000-gallons of stabilized gasoline. Less usage, of course and don't forget the 6,000-gallons of propane in the two delivery trucks.

o

"What do you think about our making a run up and down I-5 looking for tractor trailer rigs? There are probably a lot of things we could either use or could get and trade to people who need it."

"We are short on a few things, Dave. But, I don't want to turn this acreage into a parking lot."

"We could park the trailers on our side of the bridge in that open field, Tom."

"What type of things did you have in mind to get?"

We can start with basic needs, food, clothing, etc. We ought to keep an eye open for any more of those mobile homes we could add. When we picked up that iron gas pipe, we ended up with enough to plumb in more homes."

"I know one thing that we have to do, Tom. The sinks drain slowly, is your septic system overloaded?"

"It could be Dean. I tried to anticipate the possibility of growth, but back when I put it in, I only allowed for 4 families. How big do you think we should make it?"

"I think that would depend on how many septic tanks and how much pipe we could find for the drain field. It would give us one advantage because the pasture will be the drain field and the moisture should filter up to the crops."

"Manny, what will you need for equipment to put in a drain field?"

"A trencher, Tom. Putting in the drain lines using a backhoe could take all summer."

"Summer is half gone, I guess we'd better look for a trencher."

“We’re still shorthanded here. Jacob will need some time to butcher the meat. So that just leaves the 3 of us, plus Garry, Rob and Jacob’s two boys.”

“Not really, Dean. We need the boys and the girls to staff the bridge guard detail. It will just be the 5 of us.”

“How do you want to handle it? We only have the one tractor that runs. I suppose we could take a Bradley but their top speed is only 45mph.”

“I can work on that, Dad,” Garry offered. “The M6 Bradley Linebacker can go almost 55mph.”

“That would be fast enough, Garry, thanks.”

“I think we could take the semi-tractor and another,” Dave suggested. “Those Bradley are tracked vehicles, not highway vehicles. If Garry can get the tractor on the trailers to run, so much the better. We should only plan on 4 of us if Manny will be expanding the septic system.”

“All of which only points to that fact that we don’t have enough people here.”

“Let’s get what Manny needs first from Fresno. Then the 4 of us can start looking. I suppose we could put up another notice like the one that we used to find Jacob and his family.”

“Right, *Wanted – A few good men and women.*”

“Something like that except we ought to consider the skills we need and only look for people in select occupations.”

“Like what?”

“Perhaps law enforcement, they would be used to dealing with trouble. Military combat veterans would get a preference. We could use more agricultural workers, Manny is spread too thin as it is. If we could find a carpenter or someone with construction experience, great, and it would be useful to get a plumber and an electrician. Whoever we get will need to wear more than one hat.”

“We could advertise for military combat veterans and peace officers only. The vets could be our plumber, electrician, carpenter and farmers. The cops could be our security force.”

“I’ll ask April to get with Shelly and write something up.”

“How is she doing?”

“Shelly? We she says that she needs more spigots, they didn’t plan on triplets.”

“How are they managing that?”

“Samantha is nursing the other baby.”

“How did you miss the third heartbeat Rob?”

“I just assumed that one of the babies had moved.”

“It’s nice and quiet in the shelter,” Tom laughed. “You can’t hear the chickens crowing, the hogs squealing, the horses whinnying, the cows mooing or the babies crying.”

o

They had their work cut out for them. They decided that 10 more mobile homes were about their limit because it would put their expanded septic system to capacity. With the 8 homes and two shelters they already had they couldn’t really go beyond 18 homes. From mid-year until winter, they scrounged.

“Hey kid, how are you doing? Did you get that badge and gun you wanted?”

“Deputy Martin? I thought you went fishing.”

“I did, but it wasn’t all that entertaining and then TSHTF. It took me and my family a while to get back to Madera.”

“Where were you?”

“Seattle. Whoever attacked the country put a couple of nukes in there, probably trying to take out the Navy. We came back here via eastern Washington, Oregon and Nevada. How about you? What’s new?”

“I was in my first full year with the Team when TSHTF. I am a Paramedic and am all the people on the acreage have for medical care.”

“Married, single? I went to your sister’s wedding.”

A Family Alone – Chapter 28 – Growth Spurt

“I married my sister-in-law, Shelly. We have 3 children, triplets. Sam and Garry have 3 kids, too. Garry’s folks, Dean and Avis, moved to the acreage. You wouldn’t know the place anymore. A friend of Dean and Dad’s from Reno moved in too. We added a man and his family from a farm up north where we got the farm equipment. Then, we added a meat cutter from Costco to butcher our meat. We are presently looking for some veterans, a carpenter, a plumber, an electrician and some farmers. Dad and the others decided to try and attract some law enforcement officer’s for our security team.”

“My two sons were police officers in Seattle, will they do? They’re both married with families.”

“I expect so, if they’re anything like you. Everyone is going to have to do more than one thing, you know. If you know any veterans who meet our needs, it would help.”

“I’ve been gone too long Rob and I don’t have any idea who made it through the attack and who didn’t. Do you have room for my boys and us?”

“You remember where the acreage is, right? About two miles down the road where that little bridge crossed that gully, we put in a drawbridge. Just tell the people who you are and they’ll radio for instructions.”

“Have you had much trouble?”

“A little, you’ll pass their bodies on the way in. We’re big on advertising.”

o

Manny was in charge of interviewing any prospective agricultural workers. He ended up hiring 3 veterans who had farmed. The men and their families were survivors but in the aftermath of the war and all of the looting, etc. had been driven from their farms. By late fall, they had found their electrician, plumber, carpenter and 2 more married police officers. All of the 18 homes were finally occupied.

“How many hogs are you butchering?”

“18. We can breed the females and have plenty next year.”

“What about beef?”

“After I get the pork processed, we’ll butcher the 2 steers. We can breed the heifers and have more beef next year too. After that, I’ll do the chickens.”

“Darn, Jake, you’ll be cutting up meat for a couple of months before you’re all done.”

"I'll have it all done before the end of the year Tom, do you have enough freezer space for 18 hogs, 2 steers and 200 chickens?"

"I don't believe we do. I think maybe we'll have to go shopping again. If each family has a freezer do you think we'll have enough room?"

"It should be enough. The average person eats 60 pounds of beef, 50 pounds of pork, 60 pounds of chicken, 15 pounds of turkey and 15 pounds of fish a year. We'll be a little short this year but right on track next year. You can figure the yield on a beef around 700 pounds and a hog maybe 120 pounds of retail cuts plus the lard. You can figure a family of four will eat a chicken, probably an average of 52 times a year. The way I figure it, we'll be way short on meat this year, about break even next year and have some to sell the following year. One beef will feed about 10 people per year. One hog will feed 2 people per year. We'll need close to 1,000 chickens to round that out."

"Well, how many people do we have? April, you been keeping track, haven't you?"

"Yes. Here's the list:"

01. Tom and April Henson (2) Owners Bakers
02. Dean and Avis Owens (2) Co-owners Bakers
03. Garry and Samantha Owens, Paul, Caroline and Laura (5) Mechanical
04. Rob and Shelly Henson, Greg, David and April (5) Medical
05. Manny and Salina Cortez, Paulo and Maria (4) Chief Agricultural
06. Dave and Mary Williams, Kelly and Amy (4) Chief Security
07. Jacob and Sarah Young, Jacob, Robert and Sarah (5) Chief Food Processing
08. James and Rosemary Martin (2) Security
09. James and Jeanie Martin, James and Joanne (4) Security
10. Gene and Patricia Martin, Howard, Andrew and Jeanine (5) security
11. Sam and Donna Roberts, Thomas and James (4) Plumbing
12. Harry and Jen Olsen, Remy and Sandra (4) Carpentry
13. Bill and Mary Jones, Bill and Sally (4) Agricultural
14. John and Geena Davis, Jack and Shirley (4) Electrical
15. Carlos and Maria Sanchez, Carlos, Teresa, Maria and Sabrina (6) Agricultural
16. Roger and Ann Williams, Gary and Sara (4) Security
17. Dan and Dana Howe, Danny and Sheila (4) Agricultural
18. Terry and June Eller, Paula, Brenda and Calvin (5) Security

"73 people? That's an average population of just over 4 persons per house. It will take 7-8 head of cattle, 36 hogs and about 950 chickens. Plus fish and what, maybe 18 turkeys?"

"That's about right, Tom," Jacob agreed. "So as you can see, we're short on everything this year. We haven't gotten any turkeys, yet."

"I guess we're going to be eating a lot of pasta."

o

A trip to an appliance dealer's place of business that hadn't been destroyed by the nuke provided 14 operating freezers. Every family now had one, but they sure weren't full. Each family got a slab of bacon, a ham and a smoked picnic and the other cuts off ½ a hog. The beef was only enough for 20 people so it was allocated, as were the chickens. The average layer produces about 260 eggs a year. Old laying hens become those baking hens you see in a grocery or end up in other products like hot dogs, etc. A fryer is an entirely different chicken, with little body fat. They would need a minimum of 1,000 fertilized eggs a year to produce fryers and replacement chickens, possibly more. This was an agricultural problem of mammoth proportions. They could try seining fish from the lakes to the east, but that wasn't a sure fire solution. The only solution seemed to be to try and buy more meat from the folks up in the Tracy area; they had a lot of beef.

"Jacob, we bought 10 heifers and 5 steers, will that make up for the beef shortage?"

"It will, but did you get any chickens or hogs? We could still use 18 hogs and about 700 chickens."

"We can get the hogs but I don't think we can get the chickens, unless we want to settle for old laying hens."

"The only difference I can see is that we bake them instead of frying them. Maybe next year, we can produce enough fryers. And, if we're going to have baking hens, we can probably get by with about 500."

"Do you have enough help?"

"I'm teaching Jake and Bob. It doesn't take that long to learn to do some of the things. I was planning on stretching the beef by adding tallow, but since you have 5 more steers, I won't need to do that. You didn't happen to see any old dairy cows, perchance?"

"We did, what do you need those for?"

"Boneless beef to add to the ground meat."

"We'll get a couple, will that be enough?"

"It should, yes. Thanks, Dean."

o

"Jim, what is our security situation?"

“Tom, there are enough weapons to go around. We have more ammo than we’ll probably need. I’ve been working with the other security people to get everyone up to speed on the weapons. Mind if I ask you a question?”

“Not at all, what?”

“Have Dean and you had these weapons all along?”

“Since before the turn of the century for most of them. We picked up the heavy stuff from Camp Roberts and around. Does that bother you?”

“Not really, I was just curious. I don’t suppose with the situation the way it is in the country it makes much difference.”

“I hope not. We haven’t seen any of the Cal Guard or military since the balloon went up, where are they?”

“Probably mostly in the large cities. The attacks wiped a lot of the refining capacity and they have real fuel shortages. I noticed that you don’t have that problem here.”

“It took a lot of trips and a lot of work to marshal all of the resources we have. The propane came from Mammoth Lake to begin with. When we had their 30,000-gallons we went to a second source to fill the other tank. April and I had an 18,000-gallon tank of diesel fuel, 2 3,000-gallon propane tanks and 500-gallons of gas. The other fuel came off I-5. It’s all out there for the taking, but by now, I’d guess that someone has collected most of the things on the interstates. From here on out, if we can’t produce it, we’re going to be going without. Actually, Jim, I thought you were going to ask me something else.”

“Tom, I figured that all out 4 years ago about the time I retired.”

“Good, it’s been on my mind for a very long time.”

“You did what you had to. Samantha and Rob turned out well.”

“Are all cops so understanding?”

“I wouldn’t count on it if I were you. I had to manage one Deputy.”

◦

Murphy had been by once or twice, first when Tom had been shot and again when those creeps showed up at the bridge. No doubt Murphy would be back. A person couldn’t really count on some hunters not stumbling onto the acreage while they were out trying to find meat. With the extra help, Manny cleared 15 additional acres during the winter, increasing the size of the farm to 60 acres. The additional 20 acres would

allow them to grow alfalfa, corn, oats, barley and wheat plus one additional crop every year. The extra milk became cheese.

Talking to Jim Martin finally let Tom put the shooting to rest. It had eaten at him for the entire time since it had happened. Although he felt justified in what he had to do, there had been that nagging feeling that someone would figure out what really happened. He wasn't worried so much about April, Rob and Sam, but Martin had always bothered him. Which was perhaps as it should be. One should never take the killing of another human being, no matter how despicable, lightly. The matter was now closed for everyone. There were far greater concerns now than those long ago events.

o

"Again? They have 3 in diapers now."

"Well, they'll almost be out of diapers by the time this one is born."

"Only 1 April? Do you promise?"

"I'll do no such thing, Tom Henson. Rob and Shelly are such a nice couple."

"And Sam and Garry aren't?"

"I didn't say that. What are you doing, spoiling for a fight?"

"Sorry. Are Garry and Sam expecting too?"

"No, but Salina is."

"I'll have to talk to Jacob and tell him 8 beef, 37 hogs and 1,000 chickens. Or, are some of the other women expecting?"

"Not that I know of. You've been grumpy ever since we turned 50. Something wrong?"

"There is a lot wrong April. I never figured on anyone attacking this country with nuclear weapons. I know we were prepared for it, but I never believed that it would happen. The government can't seem to get its act together and help anyone either. We don't need helping, but the survivors from Fresno sure do. There were probably 80% of the people killed in the attack and the aftermath. And, unless my math is screwy, that means that about 200,000 survivors lost their homes. We have been unbelievably lucky that more of them didn't show up here at the acreage."

"Tom, do we even have a government? What's the difference one way or another? We're pretty self-sufficient now. Next year when we butcher, we have all the meat we need. And the gardens are producing well."

A Family Alone – Chapter 29 – Child Soldiers

“It’s not that we’re short of food, in fact, we’re not really short of anything at the moment. You fellas did very well on I-5. We could be worse off, couldn’t we?”

“I suppose. But you do realize that over half of the people here are youngsters, don’t you?”

“True, but not all of them are little kids. I figure that the kids who are 14 and up can probably be taught to use firearms. That will increase our defense force by about half.”

“Awfully young to turn them into killers, April.”

“It could end up being kill or be killed. You talk to Jim and his sons about it; they probably have the most law enforcement experience.”

o

“It’s a sound idea up to a point Tom. We’ll have to take it on a case-by-case basis. The boys and I can start them on the range after the usual safety lecture and teaching the operations of the weapons. What kind of weapons did you have in mind?”

“Maybe the bigger boys could use the M1As or M14s, but I’m inclined to give most of the young people M16s. It has a lighter recoil and they can transport more ammo.”

“Can we spare ammo for practice?”

“Yeah, we have plenty of the 5.56. We have less 7.62×51mm. We happen to be long on 9mm, Rob got 16 of the Beretta 92FSs from the Sheriff’s armory. You might want to train them on those as well.”

“What about the machine guns?”

“We have several veterans. I’d prefer that they use those if we need to employ them. This was more April’s idea than mine to be perfectly honest. But it might boost our defense force by up to 18 people. I’m not sure about the parents and how they will feel about their children having guns.”

“How old was Rob when you started in with firearms?”

“Twelve, but that was different. I had time for one on one instruction. Sam was 2 years older and every time Rob got a new firearm, she got the same thing.”

“I understand from Dean that his kids were about the same age. What about those girls from Tracy I heard about? Would having guns made a difference in their situation?”

"It's possible, I suppose, but they were in a Church when they were kidnapped. They wouldn't have been likely to take their guns to Church with them even if they had guns at the time."

"Different times call for different rules, my friend."

"You can check with Dave about the weapons. Rob even gave him the Berettas. This is one decision that I'm going to stay out of. I don't want to be the one to tell a family that their child was killed."

"We have a backhoe, right?"

"Yes."

"How about you have Manny or someone dig a trench about 5 yards behind the gully? It would make a good fighting position for everyone."

"I speak to him about it."

◦

"So how far back?"

"Jim suggested about 5-yards. Make it about 4' deep and you can pile the dirt in front of the trench."

"Do you want me to put a trench around the entire acreage? I have help now and can spare the time."

"If you think it's a good idea, Manny, do it. Do the gully first though. After that, it's up to you."

"Not feeling well, boss?"

"I'm ok; I just hate all of the responsibility."

"Maybe you should share it with Dean. He's a very nice man. Always treated me and my family with much respect."

◦

"Dean, got a moment?"

"Sure, Tom, what's up?"

“This whole thing is getting to me. Would you be interested in being my associate director? There seem to be dozens of decisions to make every day and my cup runneth over.”

“Thanks for asking, I’d be delighted. If there is something that requires both of our thinking, I run it by you first but it will be a joint decision. Something special brothering you at the moment?”

“Arming and training the teenagers to help defend the acreage.”

“Good idea, they’re old enough. Who is going to train them?”

“Jim Martin and his sons.”

“The young people will be fine. They won’t have to walk around with rifles, we can set up a rifle rack of some kind.”

“I also mentioned the Beretta pistols to Jim.”

“We didn’t carry a rifle and a pistol when we were in the Army. It might be good to train the kids to use them, but I don’t believe that I’d issue them. Or, if I did, it would be the same deal, stored until needed.”

“You might want to run that by Jim. I’m going home and take a nap.”

“A nap? Not feeling well?”

“Overwhelmed. Getting and staying prepared is one thing. Actually needing to use your preparations is quite another thing. You know, Dean with 73 people and more on the way, we don’t have enough shelter space.”

“What brought that up, Tom? The war in over.”

“Remember when we went to Hawthorne? That cinder cone at Mono Lake was spouting ash.”

“That was a while back Tom and nothing happened.”

“Yet.”

◦

“Jim, Tom talked to me and we’re dividing responsibility for the acreage.”

“Good, he’s worried. Did he tell you about our training the young people to use firearms?”

“That’s half of the reason why I’m here. Could we rack the rifles and the handguns? No matter how well they’re trained, their still kids.”

“I had planned on that, Dean. What’s the second thing you wanted to discuss?”

“The shelters. Tom said with 73 people and more on the way we needed to expand our shelter capacity.”

“We might. Any ideas?”

“I don’t remember where, but south of here a ways is a company that manufactures the large corrugated steel pipe. Back when I put my shelter in, I talked to the folks at Utah Shelter Systems and visited their website. The largest installation they mentioned was 6 of the large corrugated steel pipes interconnected. I don’t see why we couldn’t interconnect more. Provided we could find the pipe. The air filters Tom and I have are each rated to supply air for 50 people. We might need fans to circulate the air, but we could make it work.”

“Maybe you should look into the possibilities Dean. What’s Tom worried about? I can’t believe that we’d have another war.”

“When we went to Hawthorne to get the munitions, one of the cinder cones at Mono Lake was spouting ash.”

“Hmm. We don’t have the USGS to give us any warning these days. It’s something to think about. How far apart do you put the culverts?”

“The distance between the culverts is the diameter of the largest pipe. We’d try and find 10’ or 12’ culvert if we decided to do it. The way we built this place up, I not sure where we could put them.”

“Good point, Dean, I don’t know where we could put them either.”

o

“How long did I sleep?”

“It’s tomorrow, Tom. Want something to eat?”

“I’m not very hungry, is there coffee made?”

“It just finished dripping, honey; I’ll get you a cup.”

“I got Dean to take over part of the responsibility for managing the acreage.”

“That’s a good start.”

“I had a very strange dream, April. It was about a monolithic dome. That might be our answer to providing enough shelter for everyone.”

“Do you know how to build one?”

“Basically you put in a foundation and then you need a balloon type of form. I read an article. You spray the form with foam insulation to strengthen it and it gives you a place to attach the rebar. Then, they spray the whole thing with shotcrete. I saw pictures, but I don’t know if we could do it.”

“There’s concrete in Madera. You could get rebar a dozen different places. Make a list of materials you might need and look in the yellow pages. You won’t know until you look, will you?”

“Dean I have an idea on a solution to our shelter problem. Could you take things over while I check it out?”

“Sure. What idea?”

“A dome. The strongest natural shape is a sphere. A dome is just ½ a sphere. We wouldn’t need to worry about how much overpressure or weight accumulated on it.”

“Still worried about Long Valley?”

“Not like I was, no. If I could figure this out, we’d be completely safe, regardless of what happened. I’m going to talk to Harry Olsen and see if he knows anything about constructing domes.”

◦

“Most of the people that put those domes in are specialized contractors, Tom,” Harry replied. “I worked on the initial forming stages of one back in 2008. Can’t say as I remember much about the process though. About all I can tell you is that we put in a base or foundation and then they had this inflatable form. Oh, one thing I do remember. This was a double dome. Because of the damned earthquakes, they build a dome shaped cup to build the actual dome on. The idea was that the dome wouldn’t sink if there was liquefaction of the soil.”

Tom searched his computer looking for the term dome. He thought he’d saved some files that had copies of plans in them a very long time ago. He got about 50 hits and had to go through the files one by one. He finally found the plan, but it wasn’t for a house, it was for a church. It would comfortably seat 200 people. It was a start and perhaps he could scale back the plan. Well maybe not, they had only 4 people for a while and then it went to 8, 10 and now 73 with more on the way.

A Family Alone – Chapter 30 – Dome

From the plans, Tom developed a list of materials. Thank God he hadn't thrown the Fresno Yellow pages away. In time he had everything he needed located, except for the inflatable form.

"Harry, who built that dome you worked on?"

"A company out of Idaho, Domtec."

"Do you remember where in Idaho?"

"Idaho Falls, I think, due north of Salt Lake City. I remember because one of the guys was complaining about the Mormons."

"Dave, do you feel like going on a scavenging trip?"

"Anytime, where?"

"Idaho Falls, Idaho."

"Where the hell is that?"

"The same place it's always been, I have a road map; its north of Salt Lake City."

"That's where, but why?"

"I'd like to see if we could find a company named Domtec. Harry says that he worked on a dome they built."

"What do we want a dome for?"

"Believe it or not, I had a dream. A dome gives you the most square feet of space in the smallest footprint plus it is very strong. You probably heard that I've been concerned about the lack of shelter for all of our people. I have a plan on my computer for a church built as a concrete dome. It was up in Canada, not that it makes any difference. April got me to searching the Yellow Pages and if we can get the form, we might be able to construct a dome."

"We're going to need to be careful going to Idaho, that's Survivalist Central."

"Anyone who survived the war has probably become a survivalist. Look at us. If I had read what we're doing in a dime store novel, I wouldn't have believed it."

"The Cal guard finally showed up in Fresno."

“It took them long enough.”

“They immediately began to set up camps. I don’t want any part of that, Tom. We’d better avoid Fresno from now on. How do you plan to get to Idaho Falls?”

“I think maybe the shortest way would be to go to Sacramento, pick up I-80 and take it to Wells, Nevada. We could pick up US 93 in Wells and take it to Twin Falls, Idaho. We could pick up I-86 there and take it to I-15 and then drive the rest of the way into Idaho Falls. I estimate it to be 920-925 miles. About 14-15 hours.”

“Provided we don’t have any trouble on the way.”

“Right, provided.”

o

“Can I help you people?”

“Do you work for Domtec?”

“That’s right, we’re closed.”

“We want a dome built.”

“You should have done that before the war, mister. Like I said, we’re closed.”

“Look, my name is Tom Henson and we’re from the Fresno, California area. I’ve located all of the materials to build a concrete dome but don’t have the form. We came up here looking for the form because one of our residents worked on a project that you did in California.”

“Has anyone in your group built a dome before?”

“No. The only shelters we have were those made out of corrugated steel pipe. Our group has grown and we don’t have enough space to shelter everyone.”

“If I could get a crew together, could you provide extra labor?”

“Some, does it take a lot?”

“Not really. You have the materials? The spray foam insulation, rebar, and shotcrete?”

“Have it or can get it.”

“It’s a long way to Fresno. Assuming I could put a crew together, how would you pay us?”

“How would you want to be paid?”

“Food, lodging, replacement fuel and some of the coin of the realm.”

“That being?”

“Gold, silver, diamonds.”

“Fine, when can you begin?”

“You didn’t ask how much.”

“It doesn’t matter, we’ve been salvaging since the war. I’m sure that we can provide adequate compensation.”

“I’ll tell you anyway, Tom. It will run you 18 ounces of gold. Our crew is 6 men. I figure that 3 ounces apiece ought to be fair compensation. Plus the food, lodging and fuel.”

“What do you think Dean?”

“It was your idea, Tom. We have enough of what they want, so if you want to do it, I say you should just agree and get it done. We sure as hell can’t build a dome by ourselves.”

“The cost would be \$27,000 just for their labor and forms. Probably more like \$30 grand once we count the food, fuel and whatever else they want.”

“Tom, if you’re convinced this is the way to go, I agree with Dean. Just do it.”

“Ok, you have a deal. When can you start?”

“Give me a week or two to locate a crew and then time to get to Fresno. How do I find this place of yours?”

“We’re north of Fresno on highway 41. The name of the place is Hildreth on the map, but there isn’t much to see. When you get there, you’ll see a gated asphalt road going to the west. The gate is closed, but not locked. About 2 miles further on, you’ll come to a drawbridge. Stop there and identify yourselves to the guards. They’ll radio us and we’ll come get you.”

“How about some up-front money?”

“We can pay you $\frac{1}{3}$ when you arrive, $\frac{1}{3}$ when you’re half done and the rest when you finished.”

“Fine, see you in a couple of weeks. My name is Ron Johnson, by the way.”

“Fine Ron, we’ll be waiting for you. Give me a list of what you need and we’ll try to assemble everything in the next 2 weeks.”

“Where are we going to get that much shotcrete? Are you sure that we can get everything that Ron said he needed?”

“I’ve got everything covered. I’ll get Rob and Garry to help me and we start gathering the materials.”

◦

“I think maybe Tom is losing it, Dean.”

“Nah, he just has the bit in his teeth like I used to do. Once I got involved in a project all my troubles went away and I focused on what I was doing. He told me that he had more than enough Krugerrands to pay for their labor so it isn’t costing us a thing. We can wait and see how it turns out. I know that I’m going to cover my share of the project if it looks ok. I would only be 1 Krugerrand per family. I’ll give Tom 2, one for Avis and me and one for Garry and Sam. If you have gold, Dave, you might want to consider doing the same. It wouldn’t be right for Tom to bear the entire expense.”

“How are we on other things, Dean?”

“Good crops this year. That means we’re in good shape on food. The livestock-breeding program went well and we ended up with extra pork to sell. I also think that Jake said that we have about 1,200 chickens to butcher. That should about fill up our freezers. Anything we don’t have room for, we can sell.”

“Sell to whom? The military or Cal Guard?”

“Nope, to people who didn’t go into those stupid camps. The people who did that are probably the liberals who expected the government to save them. I’m not impressed with their inability to take care of themselves.”

“I hope that they don’t end up here looking to round us up and try to put us in one of those places.”

“Crazy, isn’t it? They took all of that time in the major cities and ignored the smaller communities like Fresno. When they finally did show up, all they wanted to do was stick the survivors in a camp, and collect all of their things. More than one family refused to go because they were collecting the firearms and food. And they weren’t holding it for you, they were confiscating it.”

◦

“We have people at the drawbridge, look alive people.”

“It must be that construction crew from Idaho.”

“Like hell it is. It’s the military and they have a tank.”

“Let’s leave the Bradley’s here and just take the pickups. I don’t want them to get any ideas about what resources we might have at our disposal.”

“Ok, Jim, whatever you suggest. I’m going to circle around behind them and prepare a little surprise, just in case.”

“Ok with me Dave, what did you have in mind?”

“The weakest spot on a tank is the rear, Jim. I picked up 2 M-47 Super Dragons Anti-Tank Guided Missiles at Hawthorne. If they don’t want to play by our rules, I can give them something to think about.”

“Check what I said. Let’s take the Bradley’s after all. I didn’t know we had any anti-tank missiles.”

“I only have 2. If they didn’t bring more than 2 tanks, we might get the drop on them.”

◦

“My name is Tom Henson, can I help you?”

“You can start by lowering the drawbridge, Henson.”

“Why would we want to do that?”

“So we can get on your side and inspect the contents of those semi-trailers you have parked over there.”

“Captain, there is nothing in those trailers that you need. We spent the better part of a year gathering those materials and they are for our use. We don’t require the help of the military, so we aren’t prepared to share what we have.”

A Family Alone – Chapter 31 – Murphy Returns

“I see that you commandeered 2 Bradley’s.”

“We did do that. It was part of the Taxpayer’s Relief Act of 2017. Where do you get off coming here and making demands? Where were you when we really needed your help? It’s been at least 3 years since the war.”

“I’m afraid that I’m going to have to insist, Henson. Get your people out of the Bradley’s and lower the drawbridge.”

“And, if I decline?”

“A Bradley can’t stand up against an Abrams.”

“True. Let me ask you a question Captain.”

“What?”

“Can an Abrams stand up against a M47 Super Dragon?”

o

“Is that a threat Henson?”

“It’s a simple question Captain. If you persist in pressing the matter, you may get the opportunity to learn if it is a threat. How many people are there inside of an Abrams tank? 4? They are American soldiers just doing their job, right? Is it their job to defend or destroy the Constitution?”

“This is a National Emergency. My authority comes from Executive Orders of the President.”

“The Emergency happened 3 years ago. Go help people who need helping, Captain.”

“Captain? You’d better listen to the man and stop acting like some nugget,” the Sergeant First Class suggested. “There is a man behind us with one Dragon ready to fire and another laying on the ground.”

“PREPARE TO FIRE,” Tom instructed loudly enough for all to hear.

“Wait a minute, Henson, let’s talk.”

“Feel free to say Goodbye, Captain.”

“Wait.”

"I'm waiting."

"Sergeant, stand the tank down."

"Sir," the man grinned.

"Lower the walking bridge Rob."

"It will take a minute, Dad."

"Captain, if you lose the sidearm, you can come over and we'll talk."

The Captain was reluctant; he wasn't used to having a civilian telling him what to do. Eventually he realized that he was in no position to do anything else. He took his pistol out of its holster and handed it to the Sergeant. He didn't hurry across the footbridge because he needed time to think.

"Captain, most of us are veterans and/or peace officers. We didn't go to you; you came here. We've managed to survive that stupid damned war and to get on with our lives. We don't need or want you here. As you've just seen we have a few surprises. Who knows, we might have more? Why don't you just get your soldiers and go back to Fresno and care for the sheeple you have in that camp of yours? I'm telling you as plainly as possible, leave us alone. Those 2 Bradley's didn't belong to the Army; they belonged to the California National Guard. If they needed or wanted them, they wouldn't have left them sitting where we found them."

"The security we've established is beyond anything you can imagine. You can't get on our small farm without paying a heavy price. We're all Americans who still believe in and defend the Constitution. You're free to go, just don't come back."

Tom turned on his heel and went to one of the Bradley's. The Captain got his men and left. They weren't sure that he wouldn't be back. That would probably depend on whether that Sergeant could pound some sense into his thick head. You could have heard a pin drop but for the sound of the vehicles as they started up and left.

"I'll have to hand it to you; Tom that Captain will be farting smoke for 2 hours."

"Let's just hope he takes my advice and doesn't come back. The last damn thing I want to do is get into it with soldiers just doing their jobs."

"I'm not aware that we have any other weapons more powerful than those two anti-tank missiles, what did you threaten him with?"

"Just the Constitution; I didn't even know Dave brought those missiles back from Hawthorne. Even when the Supreme Court said a few years back they could take away your

property, they still had to go through Due Process in the form of an Eminent Domain proceeding. If they come in here with a Brigade, we can't stop them, but to tell you the truth, if that happened, I'm not so sure I'd want to be an American any more. We'd better come up with an alternate plan in case that happens. And, if any of you disagree with what I told him either you can leave or April and I will."

"What was that all about, Dad?"

"I've had all of the do-gooders and liberals I can take Rob. I meant every word. Anyway those folks from Idaho should be here in a day or two and we'll get that dome erected."

"Dean, do you have a moment?"

"Sure Dave what's up?"

"There was a bunker full of TOW missiles at Hawthorne. I think I'm going to get a couple people and go get them. If we're going to end up squaring off against the Army, I want some real firepower. Can you cover for me for a day while I'm gone?"

"Gone where? I thought you were out checking the crops."

"Thanks, we'll leave immediately and with any luck we'll be back later tonight."

"Where did Dave go Dean?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Tom, I told him I'd say he was checking the crops, but to tell you the truth, he's off on a little mission to back up the claims you made to that Captain."

"Going back to Hawthorne for the TOW missiles is he?"

"You do pay attention, I wondered about you sometimes. Is the dome because you expect Long Valley to blow?"

"I have no information to suggest that it will, but being prepared is about anticipating events, not waiting for them to happen. I explained to April, once, that it isn't likely that the caldera will blow. And the last major eruption 760,000 years ago sent all of the ash to the east. It will be tough enough if it does go just protecting our livestock. I don't want to worry about the people too."

"You pretty much threw down the gauntlet for that Captain."

"I didn't do it for the Captain, Dean. That Sergeant First Class didn't miss one word I told his boss. You were in the Army, who really runs the services anyway?"

"I suppose the NCOs, Tom. They're the people that have to implement all of the orders."

“My thinking exactly. That Captain was probably some ROTC officer who was in the Reserves and got called to active duty. I can’t tell you if he was just doing his best to do his job or had his head stuck up his butt. Either way, he might think twice before he bothers us. I half suspect that FEMA is behind what’s happening anyway. There was an accumulation of Executive Orders going back several years that gave them God like powers in the case of a National Emergency.”

“You don’t go half way do you?”

“Hell no. It was like that trouble with those punks that had the girls from Tracy. We could have used the coaxial machine guns but we used the 25mm chain guns. Never take a knife to a gunfight, partner. The shells went right through those punks and destroyed their vehicles giving us two victories for every shell.”

o

“The guys from Idaho are here.”

“Someone show them back to the acreage and let’s get this show on the road.”

“Nice, fancy setup. Where do you want the dome built? And we’re here so I’d appreciate our traveling money.”

“Here you go Ron, 6 Krugerrands. We want to put the dome in over there between the trees and the house to the right of our lane to the houses. We weren’t sure how you wanted the area prepared so we held off. Our construction guys suggested that since this is earthquake country, we’d want the dome sitting on its own dome in case the soil liquefied.”

“I hadn’t counted on that, Tom. We can do it without a problem but it will take more time and materials. Can you handle another 3 Krugerrands?”

“I can. And we got extra materials. Are you going to use wet or dry shotcrete?”

“Either way, the dry method is stronger, but it is slightly more time consuming.”

“And naturally will cost more right?”

“Yes, but maybe we can work something out. You don’t have any more of the Bradley’s do you?”

“I can tell you where to get some and where to get the ammo.”

“Good enough. Forget the 3 Krugerrands if you can help us come up with two of those and the ammo.”

"I should warn you Ron. The Army came calling a couple of days back. We ran them off but for all I know they'll be back."

"Could we get the Bradley's first? They might end up coming in handy."

"Sure. You tell Manny and Harry what you need in the way of grading and we'll go after them tomorrow. One of our people went after some TOW missiles and there are some of the Bradley's that were already set up for TOWs. In fact I think there might have been 4. So maybe we can kill two birds with one stone and get some for both of us."

"Is there plenty of ammo available for the chain guns?"

"We get it from a training range for the Cal Guard. You might be surprised."

"We don't really need TOW missiles, Tom. It might be difficult for us to get a resupply. If we could just get a couple of the standard M2A3 Bradley's that would suit us."

"Well, we'll give you ours and keep the 4 we get from the camp then. I'll take care of that and you can go ahead and get started on the Dome."

o

"Jim, we need four of the Bradley's from Camp Roberts. Could you organize some people to go get them?"

"The same models as you have?"

"No. They have a model equipped to launch TOW missiles, the CFVs. Dave went to Hawthorne to get a supply of the missiles. We could also use all of the 25mm ammo you can bring back. You'll be able to distinguish the latter model Bradley's because they have a pair of tubes to launch the TOW missiles."

"You know where we ought to go, don't you? Barstow/Yermo."

"I'm just afraid that it's much too long after the attacks, Jim. By now I'm sure that the Marine Corps has that place under lock and key. If we could have gotten out of the shelters sooner, that might have been a viable option. We'd better settle for what we can get instead of what we want."

"We'll have to empty that lowboy up by the bridge so we can haul all four of the Bradley's. How much ammo do you want?"

"Every last bit your people can transport. There were several thousand rounds."

A Family Alone – Chapter 32 – Evening the Odds

“Ron, you and your men can eat with April and me. She just baked bread today; you might be in for a treat.”

“What do you have for accommodations?”

“We pulled in 2 more mobile homes. They’re 3 bedroom and everything is hooked up and operating. There is one on either end of the row of homes. Feel free to help yourselves.”

“Good bread, thanks Mrs. Henson. You folks have quite the setup here. It looks like you have enough livestock to feed everyone.”

“We’ll even have enough to sell when we butcher in November.”

“Who do you sell to, the Army?”

“No and especially not after the trouble we had with them a few days back. Tom said we’d probably sell it to the people who refused to go into the Army camps.”

“Not many places have electricity these days. Are those solar panels?”

“Yes, they’re our primary source of power, but we have two backup generators too.”

“Do you folks have a lot of weapons?”

“Enough for any trouble that comes along.”

o

“That Ron was asking a lot of questions Tom. You better say something to Jim about keeping an eye on them. I didn’t tumble at first, but when he started asking questions about our weapons, I clammed up.”

“It might be just as well, honey. People don’t need to know our business. If there had been any other way of getting a dome put in, I’d have done it. Dean and I are going to pull the LUWA systems and some other things out of the two existing shelters and use them for storage. We thought they might make good ammo bunkers. We’re going to need a lot of furnishings for the new shelter when it’s completed, any ideas?”

“We have a fairly good relationship with those folks in Tracy, maybe we could get what we need there. I don’t think you want to go into Fresno do you?”

“Not if I can avoid it. It’s probably better to give that Captain a while to cool off.”

“Rob told Shelly that the Captain was very high handed.”

“Just a man trying to do a job. Rob was right, though, it wasn’t *do you need help or can we do anything for you?* It was more in the vein of *you’re going to do what I say.* Fortunately Dave had those anti-tank missiles and we caught the Captain between a rock and a hard place.”

“Maybe we should do something to improve security a little. Couldn’t we put in some kind of warning system?”

“Possibly, I’d have to take to Jim about that. What did you have in mind, April?”

“Oh, I have no idea. Motion detectors probably wouldn’t work because all of the wild animals around. Closed circuit TV would be nice, but that means a lot of extra equipment and I have no idea where we could get it.”

“We can see about bringing in two more families after they finish the dome. We’ll have two empty mobile homes. One thing we could do is centralize all of our operations in the Dome after it’s finished. The size I have them building would have ample space for a second floor where we could put offices. As it is, I think we’re pushing the limits of our septic system by going to 20 homes.”

“We should be ok, Tom. You’ll be converting the two old shelters.”

“I guess it doesn’t make any different, April, we don’t have any more space to expand the drain field.”

“Tom, Manny cleared a little land expanding the pasture, wouldn’t you have room for one tank and the drain field? I remember that you said that we were at capacity.”

“I’ll take that up with our plumber Sam and he can work it out with Manny. We’re going to have to call our Sam Samantha from now on, otherwise we won’t know if we talking about our daughter or the plumber.”

“With all of the people living here now it does get confusing.”

◦

It was surprising how quickly Ron and his crew erected the dome. Money had changed hands twice more; they filled the fuel tanks on the Bradley’s and added non-perishable food. They’d gotten by cheaply when you thought about it. Dave had done well in Hawthorne, bringing home 96 of the TOW missiles. He mentioned that that cinder cones were putting out smoke, all three of them now.

Unknown to the residents of the acreage, the Air Force had made an over flight with a reconnaissance aircraft on behalf of the Army. While that Captain didn’t really have time

to harbor a grudge, he had a long memory. However, he had more to be concerned about than those residents, the USGS was back and they had issued a caution about the caldera. It didn't quite make it to the warning stage, but there had been several small earthquake swarms and the Mono cinder cones were putting out a little ash.

Ignorant of the real situation over in Long Valley, everyone on the acreage was busy farming, upgrading the facilities, or finishing off the dome. Samantha decided that 3 kids were enough. Rob and Shelly named their new baby girl Michelle. Salina named their son Roberto and she was just getting started having kids.

Sixty acres may seem like a lot of ground. But when you have 20 families, a pasture, and 40 acres of crops, etc. it gets crowded. All of the batteries ended up in Tom's old shelter, freeing the 2 stalls in the barn. They estimated their available power at 235kw from solar. The two generators were moved to the Dean's shelter and one powered the command center and the other the dome itself in backup mode.

Butchering time ended up being divided into several sessions because the walk-in cooler only had so much capacity. Jacob and his sons now had full time work processing the meat. The new residents in homes 19 and 20 were:

Updated:

- 04. Rob and Shelly Henson, Greg, David, April and Michelle (6) Medical
- 05. Manny and Salina Cortez, Paulo, Maria and Roberto (5) Chief Agricultural
- 19. Jack and Susan Tyler, Andrew and Erica (4) Agricultural
- 20. Joseph and Gwen Roswell, Terry, Jean and Kathy (5) Electrical/Mechanical

The latter two men were veterans, Joe a highly decorated Gunnery Sergeant who happened to be a fan of Clint Eastwood. While Joe complained that the movie, *Heartbreak Ridge* didn't quite show it how it was in real life, it was a good primer. Joe considered the Bradley's 3rd best, preferring the LAV-25s or the Stryker CFV, another variant of the Stryker. Unlike an Abrams tank or a Bradley fighting vehicle, the Stryker IFV was a medium-weight, eight-wheel vehicle that could carry 11 soldiers and weapons at speeds of more than 60 miles an hour. With its giant rubber tires instead of noisy tracks, it was fast and quiet and drew on the brigade's reconnaissance drones, eavesdropping equipment and the Army's most advanced communications gear to outflank an enemy rather than out slug it. The Stryker CFV was outfitted with 4 Hellfire missiles, but neither the vehicles nor the missiles were available.

o

Tom had gotten April those baking pans she wanted, but could only find the brand that baked 4 1½ pound loaves instead of 3. April and Avis were baking the whole wheat bread and Salina was making tortillas for everyone. With her children to care for, Salina didn't have time to clean homes any longer. It had been difficult, but they eventually managed to find enough of the high efficiency wood burning stoves to upgrade all of the

mobile homes. The only fuel they could get was more propane; they were going to have to make do with their supply of diesel and gasoline.

The following spring, the military was planning on revisiting the acreage and the Captain, now a Major, wanted to bring the residents into the fold. The Air Force over flight occurred while the dome was being constructed and showed 6 Bradley's. Jack Tyler was the former Army Sergeant First Class and had been the Sergeant at the drawbridge when the confrontation had occurred a year before. He'd gathered his wife and kids from Ft. Irwin and when his enlistment ran out, simply left the Army and applied for membership at the acreage. They were glad to have him; he'd known the Major for a long time.

◦

"What's the man like, Jack?"

"He's about 2 pay grades ahead of his skill level, Jim. They have pictures of this place now. Got the Air Force to do an over flight. Where are the other two Bradley's?"

"They went to the guys who constructed the dome, part of the payment. We picked up the 4 CFVs at Camp Roberts and gave them our two IFVs."

"I brought my personal weapons, a M1A and a M1911. I didn't have anything for my family; weapons have become hard to come by over the last 4 years."

"See Dave, and he'll arrange whatever you need. What do you want to do, work for me in Security or help Manny farm?"

"Can't I do both, Jim? I could work for Manny most of the time, but if there's trouble, I'm still a soldier."

"Most of the people here are part of Security, Jack. We've trained and armed everyone age 14 and up. We outfitted the shelter with furniture we got from the Defense Logistics Facility in Tracy. The top floor is our Command and Control Center. We've tried to anticipate our needs so it had a full suite of military communication gear. If the Army gets determined, there is no way we can hold them off."

"All I can tell you is that they're planning on coming back in force. You're aware of what's happening in Long Valley?"

"Dave said that all three cinder cones we putting out smoke last summer."

"The Resurgent dome has risen considerably since then. The USGS has been in and they didn't issue a volcano alert, but they did warn of increased activity."

"Do you think we should send out scouts to check it out?"

“That’s up to you. If it were up to me, I’d do it.”

◦

“Shelly, would you mind terribly if we didn’t have any more children? I only figured on two or three.”

“Rob that’s fine with me, I’m exhausted. We didn’t have as many diapers as we needed and the triplets ran me ragged doing laundry. Sam told me Garry and she were going to stop at three. How are your medical supplies holding out?”

“That depends on what you’re talking about. The things with a longer shelf life are still available. Shelly, I’m a Paramedic, not a doctor. We’ll be ok unless we get people who are badly hurt. It’s straining my training just to care for bullet wounds. We don’t have a lot of diagnostic equipment either, so most of the time all I can do is make an educated guess. I think a doctor might have been able to save that one girl from Tracy if we could have gotten her to one in time. I hate losing patients.”

“Get used to it Rob. You’re a Paramedic; you do what you can and bury the rest. Do your best not let it eat you up; I was afraid we were going to have an epidemic after the war.”

“We’re isolated here, that helped. Commercial aviation completely shut down and that helped more. Our water supply is good so we didn’t have problems with bad water. I managed to immunize everyone as if they were going to a foreign country. However, I can’t vaccinate anyone else unless I can get more vaccines. As a precaution I used the tetanus vaccine I had and immunized everyone just before it expired. It only had a shelf life of 36 months.”

“How long do the vaccines last?”

“It varies, from 12 months to 3 years on most. Some have even shorter shelf lives.”

◦

“What did it look like? Were the 3 cinder cones putting out ash?”

“If it were only that, I wouldn’t be worried, Jim. We need to call a meeting.”

A Family Alone – Chapter 33 – The Best Laid Plans

The no name Major discounted the USGS warning; the caldera had rumbled many times before and hadn't had a significant eruption. He figured that the worst that could happen was like 200 and some years before when the cinder cones had been created. At least he was rid of that pain in the butt, Sergeant First Class Jack Tyler. Rather than sticking around to finish out his 20 years, Tyler had bailed at 16. That man wouldn't be getting a pension. He had been up for Master Sergeant, but the Captain, now a Major, had blocked the promotions with bad Fitness Reports.

His plan was quite simple, bring in some arty and destroy the bridge and the gully. He had some 105mm howitzers available for the job, no sense in bringing in Paladins to destroy one small gully. He was totally unaware of the conversation that April and Tom had about expanding their defense perimeter, just as they were unaware of his specific plans.

Tom had talked to Jim Martin about April's suggestion of expanding their security. He also shared her opinions about the motion sensors and closed circuit TVs. Jim told Tom that even if they could find CCTVs in Fresno, the odds favored most of them not working. He also agreed with April's assessment of the problems associated with motion detectors. His suggestion was to station a couple of scouts up at the road with radios and horses. In the event that someone did show up to cause trouble, the scouts could give a radio warning while they rode the 2 miles to the bridge.

"Do you guys remember the First Gulf War?" the Gunny asked.

"I was there," Tom had replied.

"The only reason I bring it up was that Saddam had a lot better tank trap than the little gully we have and it didn't stop our forces."

"Gunny, we weren't trying to stop the Army or Marines. The gully was just to slow down the mutant zombie bikers, you know the bad guys."

"As long as you know, fine. Tyler tells me that that Army Major really is carrying a grudge."

o

"Is everyone here? Good. Will your scouts please give their report, Jim?"

"I'll go first Dad," Jim Jr. replied.

"All three of the cinder cones are spewing a lot of smoke and ash. Mammoth Mountain is also leaking lava. I'm not sure what that all means, folks. Usually a volcano has the thick lava that doesn't go explosive only the really thin lava does. The magma pool un-

der the cinder cones gives every impression of being thin lava. I had a chance to talk with one of those geologists from the USGS. He said that he'd recommended that the USGS issue a yellow level on the Mono cinder cones."

"I'll take it from here, Jim," Gene continued. "I got to discussing the eruption 760,000 years ago with him. It released 600km³ of material from vents just inside the margin of the caldera. About half of the material was ejected in a series of pyroclastic flows of a very hot (1,500 degree Fahrenheit or ~815 degree Celsius) mixture of noxious gas, pumice and ash that covered the surrounding area hundreds of feet deep. One lobe of this material moved south into Owens Valley, past where Big Pine now lies. Another lobe moved west over the crest of the Sierra Nevada and into the drainage of the San Joaquin River. The rest of the pyroclastic material along with 300 km³ of other matter was blown as far as 25 miles into the air where winds distributed it as far away as eastern Nebraska and Kansas. However, much of the material ejected straight into the air fell back to earth to fill the 2 to 3 km deep caldera two-thirds to its rim."

"What about the Resurgent Dome?"

"That's filled or filling with the thick, non-explosive lava."

"What's the bottom line? Is it going to blow or not?"

"Yes, it's going to blow or not. He said the probability was about 60%."

"I suppose we'd better assume that it will. Get the protective barriers up around the coral. Call the scouts and have them pull back to the drawbridge. Someone cycle the generators and make certain that they'll fire up if we need them. We'd better start moving things into the dome. Start with the freezers first, then the contents of the refrigerators and finally the canned goods."

"Aren't you over reacting Dean?"

"The odds have historically run about 1 chance in 250,000. I don't think so, no."

"The scouts are pulling back, but they report the Army was pulling in and setting up artillery."

"Damn. What next?"

"Hey, look at the bright side, Tom. If the caldera blows maybe the Army will get caught in the ash."

"Tell the guards to pull back from the drawbridge as soon as the scouts clear it."

o

“Standby to fire.”

“Are you sure you want to do this Major? They’re just some civilians.”

“FIRE.”

Three barrages totally destroyed the gully and both bridges. They also set off the homemade dynamite mines. The Major saddled his troops up and proceeded towards the acreage. He was just beginning when the Mono craters exploded. A major earthquake accompanied the explosion, several in fact.

◦

The San Joaquin River is one of the largest rivers in the state of California. It originates high on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada, near Mammoth Mountain. The San Joaquin River drains most of the area from the southern border of Yosemite, south to Kings Canyon National Park, making it the second largest river drainage in the state. It emerges from the foothills of the Sierras at what was once the town of Millerton, now the location of Friant Dam, which forms Millerton Lake. The river flows west to the trough of the Central Valley, where it is joined by the Sierra’s other great rivers and then flows north to the Delta and then San Francisco Bay.

◦

“Damn it. Sergeant assemble the troops and pull back to Fresno.”

“Major that’s twice. I wouldn’t try and take these people on again; they seem to have someone watching out for them.”

“Sergeant, if I want you to have an opinion, I’ll tell what it is.”

“What happened to the Major?”

“I’m damned if I know, Lieutenant. I think a rock fell out of the sky and hit him in the head. You’d better get with the Captain, Sir, and get these troops back to Fresno before we get a heavy ash fall from the eruption.”

(It’s probably against the UCMJ for a Sergeant to bop a Major with a rock. But, it is always open season on assholes.)

◦

“Manny, are the livestock going to be ok?”

“I’ve done all that I can, Tom, they’re wrapped in canvas in the corral or in crammed into the barns.”

“What about the poultry, are they ok?”

“We rounded up as many as we could in the time we had. We may lose a few birds but that will depend on how bad this eruption is. The cattle, horses, and hogs are secure. The turkeys are so nervous, I can’t promise you anything.

o

“How did you know?”

“How did I know what, Dean?”

“How did you know that the caldera was going to blow?”

“Sorry, Dean, I don’t have a crystal ball, I didn’t know. It just seemed prudent to have shelter for all of the families. We’re beginning to get ash so I’d suggest that we button the dome up.”

“We still have a couple of freezers to move. I’ll tell them to hurry. Do we have time to get the rest of the canned goods?”

“They should be ok where they are. We’ll lose whatever is in the refrigerators when the power goes out, but I don’t think it will amount to much. We’ll have to try and keep the ash off the solar panels as much as possible. If we can’t, we’ll be ok with the backup generators, I hope.”

The dome was large, 120 diameter, a radius of 60’. The main level had ~ 11,304 square feet. The upper levels only added to their storage space and they had 5 floors with the C³I in the cupola at the top. The original idea had been to plan about 100 ft² per person. At the moment it worked out to more like 134 ft² per person on the main floor, but their population was growing. April and the others got coffee on, bread rising in pans and decided to make a beef stew for supper rather than try to plan a complex meal.

Do the math:

$$\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{4}{3} * 3.14 * (60 * 60 * 60) \right) = \frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{4}{3} * 3.14 * 216000 \right) = \frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{4}{3} * 678,240 \right) = \frac{1}{2} (904,320) = 452,160 \text{ ft}^3$$

It might have been overkill, but Tom wasn’t so certain he could get the contractor back from Idaho and they had built a similar sized dome in Louisiana. He also figured that if the eruption destroyed their homes, there was enough space in the dome to erect apartments for all of the residents. Besides, that’s how much material they had available to use. Rather than try and construct an elevator, they had used 2 Warn 12K winches to raise and lower a 6’ square by 7’ high box. It wasn’t elegant, but it worked.

“Tom the USGS just issued a Red level volcano warning.”

“About one day late and several billion dollars short. Do they have any idea about the size of the eruption?”

“They’re speculating that it’s about half the size of the eruption that happened 760,000 years ago, but it will depend on how long the eruption lasts. At the moment, they’re saying ~ 300 km³.”

“What is the wind direction?”

“It’s normal, out of the west. Maybe we won’t get so much ash.”

“Can someone fill me in on what happened to the bridge and gully?”

“Destroyed, 3 artillery barrages. The Army pulled out.”

“Damn it to hell. Oh well, anyone hurt?”

“No one, Dad.”

“Thank God for that. After this is over, we’re going to have to do something about the Army.”

“Tom, I’ve been thinking about our using scouts with horses. It was staring me right in the face and never occurred to me. The dome is 60’ high. We can mount a zoom camera on it and probably see all the way to the highway. We’d only need one camera and if nothing else could use a TV as a monitor. Obviously that gully won’t stop the military, not with them having artillery. I’ve been talking with Jack and Gunny and they both feel that our only choice is to locate some anti-tank mines.”

“Tom, I know where we can get the M-19 ATMs,” Gunny offered. “They’re plastic so they are hard to detect. The downside is that if they know the mines are there, they can take them out with the mine removing systems that create an overpressure.”

“I don’t know about those, how much pressure does it take to set one off?”

“350 pounds.”

“That would mean that we could set one off with a horse wouldn’t it?”

A Family Alone – Chapter 34 – Plan B

“Quite possible. However, I’d suggest that we not mine the road we use. And by that I mean that we need to build a new road and mine the existing one. As long as everyone here knows where the real road is, we should be safe.”

“How long do you think we’re going to need to stay in the shelter this time? Last time turned into forever.”

“As soon as the ash settles we should be able to go out. If we don’t get a lot of ash, maybe the weather won’t be bad as long.”

“It’s going to affect a couple growing seasons. I’d guess we won’t be selling produce anytime soon.”

“Gunny, will it be any problem getting the anti-tank mines?”

“It shouldn’t, once we can get out of here.”

“Jim can you come up with a camera?”

“Can do. I’ll get one with long range capabilities and night vision.”

“Hey, I just checked, we’re not getting much ash.”

“It might be a good time to go shopping, Tom.”

“Manny, you’ll have to grade some dirt into the gully so they can get across. How are you guys going to handle the shopping trip?”

“I’ll take a Bradley and the normal compliment to find the cameras and equipment.”

“What do you think Jack,” Gunny asked, “One Bradley and one semi?”

“How many of the mines are available?”

“At least 2 semi loads.”

“Let’s get them all before someone else does.”

◦

There were 2-semi loads of mines and more. Gunny was about ½ right; there was 1 semi load of ATMs and more than 1 semi load of APMs. They came back, unloaded and returned to get the remainder of the mines. They were the old mines that had long been outlawed by Presidential directive, M-14 and M-16APMs and M19ATMs. You know the

first two types: the M-14 concussive and the M-16 Bouncing Betty. The latter was the square plastic M-19 ATM.

Even though they had the mines, they didn't initially deploy them. None of the veterans want to be the person responsible for American deaths. The underlying theory of mines had been to stop tanks. Antipersonnel mines came along and were planted in anti-tank minefields to prevent combat engineers from disarming the anti-tank mines. With the mines in their possession, they had one immediate advantage; another party couldn't use the mines against them.

"It would help if we had more information about that Major's plans. I wish we had some Special Forces trained people of some kind."

"We could always slip into Fresno and see what we could find out."

"Perhaps someone should do that, Jim. I need to talk to Manny and see what the crop situation is going to be for the following year."

o

"We didn't get so much ash that I can't spread it with the drag and then plow it in, Tom. We had a problem with water the last time, but I think we can irrigate. It's going to depend on how much sunshine we get. According to the radio most of the ash went to the east. We should go ahead and plant and hope for the best."

"Apparently the new caldera is far smaller than the previous one. The USGS was projecting 300km³ of ash but it's been revised downward to 200km³. It only made it as far east as Colorado."

"Livestock ok?"

"Came through with flying colors."

"Great, Manny, please keep Dean informed and let one of us know if you need anything."

o

"We don't have to worry about that Major, he's dead."

"What happened to him?"

"The official word was he was stuck by a rock from the eruption."

"Official?"

“Yeah, well, the scuttlebutt is that he was fragged.”

“Good, it couldn’t have happened to a nicer SOB.”

“Do we want to move the trailers further back so they’re across the road? We didn’t have any destroyed but a long round slightly damaged one.”

“There isn’t any room across the road. What’s the plan, clear an area and use the wood for firewood?”

“Tom we thought we talk to you first.”

“Talk to Dean, he’s as much in charge as I am. It’s time for me to go take a nap.”

o

“What’s wrong Tom, you look flustered.”

“April do I have to make all of the major decision around here? I told everyone to talk to Dean.”

“What’s our security situation?”

“Jim is getting the camera in and we’ll be able to see to the highway. Its wireless and will traverse in a full circle. He and his staff are setting up their operation in the cupola of the dome. That Major who gave us all of that static last year is dead. Gunny said that the scuttlebutt was that he was fragged. Apparently someone hit him over the head with a rock.”

“Go take a nap and I’ll have a pan of cinnamon rolls done when you wake up.”

“It there anything else I need to worry about while I’m trying to sleep?”

“Only good news, but it will keep.”

Tom slept until the following morning. April was concerned and sought advice from Rob.

“Has he ever done this before?”

“Once, a while back, Rob. It was before we built the dome.”

“When he’s up and around, let me know and I’ll check him over.”

“Should I be concerned?”

“Has he had any complaints?”

“Not that I know of. He’s been short with people and grouchy sometimes.”

“I’ll check him over Mom, but I think I’ll put him on a vitamin supplement.”

When Rob got home he transferred his supply of Prozac to an empty bottle and added a label that said, “Vit. Sup.” He wasn’t a doctor, just a Paramedic, but it seemed to him that Tom was displaying possible signs of depression. They were all unhappy about the situation they found themselves in, but so far only Avis had required treatment. The Zoloft had gotten her through her episode and it hadn’t returned.

“I was tired, how long did I sleep?”

“17 hours. Are you feeling any better?”

“Some thanks. I supposed that I missed the cinnamon rolls, huh?”

“They’re in the oven. Later, Rob wants you to stop by for something, he didn’t say. Maybe to check you over and make sure you’re ok.”

It was a rudimentary physical: weight, blood pressure, pulse, temperature, listening to Tom’s heart and lungs. Rob inquired whether Tom had any complaints and other than occasional fatigue, Tom claimed not. Rob gave his Dad the Vit. Sup. and told him it could take a few weeks before he got any real results. Tom was almost like a ship without a rudder, checking on this and that, trying to see that all of their bases were covered.

“Have you been riding lately Tom?” Dean asked.

“It’s been a while.”

“Get your Winchester and Vaquero and we’ll saddle up. We really ought to survey the condition of the acreage.”

“Ok, Dean, I’ll do it. Give me a few minutes and I’ll meet you in the barn.”

“April, have you seen my western hat? Dean and I are going for a ride and check out the acreage.”

“It’s in the hall closet; I’ll get it while you change. What did Rob say?”

“He couldn’t find anything wrong, apparently, so he put me on a vitamin supplement. He told me that it could take from 3 weeks to 6 months for it to work.”

“Well good, it can’t hurt. Here’s your hat.”

“Sorry if I’ve been grumpy lately.”

“It’s a sign of the times. There have been a lot of grumpy people lately. Don’t worry about it.”

◦

“Where do you want to start?”

“Across the road. I want to see how they’re doing on clearing a space for the trailers. After, we’ll ride up to the gully and see what’s left of our bridge.”

“How’s it going Manny?”

“Good, Dean, we’re almost done. We’re pulling the trailers straight in and plan to park the tractors (they now had 3) behind the trailers. We have a large pile of wood to cut up for firewood. How are you Tom? Checking the place out?”

“I’m fine, Manny. Maybe a little run down. What’s the situation on the ash?”

“We spread it and turned the soil. I’ve got some people disking so we can try in get a crop in.”

“Manny, Tom and I are going to ride up to the gully.”

“See you later.”

◦

“...so we put in some 3’ culvert and Manny graded over the gully. We couldn’t get any asphalt, so the road is just crushed rock for this short stretch. There isn’t anything left of either bridge. It wouldn’t have stopped anyone anyway, Tom, not really.”

“Heard any more from the Army?”

“They’re up to their butts in reptiles. The word is that they’re going to pull out of Fresno and go east to help folks in the aftermath of the eruption.”

“Anything new on that?”

“We won’t be able to go to Hawthorne for any more supplies. Some people from USGS were around measuring the depth of the ash. We got about a foot on average.”

A Family Alone – Chapter 35 – Plan B Cont.

When they arrived at the road, the hulks of the vehicles were nowhere to be seen. The 16 crosses that Manny had erected were also gone, as was the gate.

“Where’s the gate Dean?”

“We hauled it and the cars off the property. We had a discussion and while those things might work to dissuade some bad guys, they also advertised our presence. Jim suggested that before those cars were piled up at the road, this looked just like an unused country lane. Said he always had trouble finding the road.”

“Can’t see the dome from here, can you?”

“No, you can’t, Tom. Most passerby’s would never give this old road a second look. Jim put in that camera that can actually see all of the way to this location. It has a 400X zoom.”

“How is Avis doing these days? The four of us ought to get together and do something. Get the kids and grandkids together for a family thing.”

“What, a picnic?”

“Or something. I’ll suggest it to April.”

“Let’s ride back and see how much timber they’ve cleared and how much land we have under cultivation, Tom.”

“Lead the way. It’s downright peaceful, Dean. No mushroom clouds, no ash falling and no Army at the gate. Oops, I spoke too soon. Someone is pulling in a singlewide, looks like a soldier. Were we expecting anyone?”

“Not that I know of.”

“Help you Master Sergeant?”

“Looking for a place for me and my family. Master Sergeant Lincoln Washington, late of the United States Army.”

“Retired?”

“Nope, deserted. Had my 30 in but they wouldn’t let me go. Had a bit of a problem with a Major when we were out here a short time back shooting artillery at you folks. They pulled out of Fresno and headed east. I got my family, a mobile home and headed here.”

“The recently promoted Major who had it in for us?”

“The one and the same.”

“We heard he had gotten killed. Scuttlebutt says fragged.”

“That Major got hit in the head by a rock that came flying out of the air. Darnest thing you ever saw, fellas. There was only just the one rock. What do you think of the likelihood of something like that happening?”

“It will take us a while to get your trailer setup, Sergeant.”

“I can pay my way, fellas, I brought a few things.”

“Weapons?”

“Plus ammo and other things, yes.”

“We’ll get you with Dave, he’s our armorer. Sarge, we’re doing an inspection of the place. I’ll radio to the compound and tell them to expect you. Ask for a man named Jim Martin or Dave Williams, they’re in charge of Security and the armory.”

◦

“What’s the penalty for harboring a fugitive, Dean?”

“Did you notice the insignia on his uniform? I think that Mr. Washington is going to be a welcome addition. Combat engineer.”

“I didn’t notice. Why don’t we conclude the tour tomorrow? I think maybe I’d like to get to know Mr. Washington a little better.”

“Jim, this is Dean, come back.”

“What’s up Dean?”

“There is an Army Master Sergeant and his family headed your way. See if you can get his trailer parked on the east end of the row of homes and have Dave get with him. The man says he has some weapons and ammo. The name is Lincoln Washington.”

“10-4.”

◦

Add: 21. Lincoln and Selma Washington, Jefferson and Abraham (4) Demolitions/Baker

“April, we added another family, the Washington’s.”

“I’ll have to go say hi.”

“Jim put their trailer at the east end.”

“What’s his specialty?”

“Pain in the butt removal. He’s a combat engineer. He also might be a baseball player, a pitcher.”

“You seem to be feeling better, have a nice ride?”

“Dean and I only got about ½ ways through our tour when the Sergeant showed up. But, now that you mention it, I do feel a little better, thanks.”

◦

“Hi, I’m April Henson. We own the acreage. Welcome.”

“My name is Selma, April. The older boy is Jefferson and the younger, Abraham. My man is with your security people.”

“How are you fixed for food, Selma?”

“We have a lot of MRE’s.”

“Jacob is butchering pork today. I’ll mention to him that you need some meat. Do you have a freezer?”

“It’s empty.”

“We can fix that. If you and the boys want to come with me, we can get you some food from central stores and I can introduce you to some of the people living here.”

“Jacob, meet Selma Washington. These are her sons, Jefferson and Abraham. Selma has an empty freezer, can you help out?”

“If you young fellas want to empty out that freezer over there, it has a side of beef, a hog and chickens. You can use my pickup to haul the meat. Mrs. Washington, have they hooked up your electricity yet?”

“No, but they’re working on it.”

“One of you youngsters get an extension cord from out of my toolbox on my pickup to connect the freezer until they get your electricity running.”

“What did you do, Selma, homemaker?”

“Baker, April. I worked for grocery stores for several years.”

“Really? We could use a baker. Avis and I have been baking everyone’s bread for, well since forever. We can stop by the dome and I’ll show you the kitchen setup.”

“What’s that dome all about?”

“It’s a shelter, Selma. It is big enough to house everyone here for an extended period. There are some large commercial ovens in the kitchen and a cafeteria. The Security offices are on the 4th floor. That is probably where your husband is. The medical clinic is on the 4th floor. My son Rob is our medic. We don’t have a doctor or dentist, but he is a Paramedic. Oh, hi, Avis. Avis, this is Selma Washington, they just moved in.”

“Nice to meet you Selma.”

“The two men you saw when you came on the property were my husband Tom and Avis’s husband Dean, Selma. Tom and I live in the big old house and Avis and Dean in the nice doublewide sitting next door.”

“Do the two of you bake every day?”

“Sure do,” Avis replied.

“I’d be glad to help out.”

“Great,” Avis smiled.

◦

“These are our central stores, Selma. Each trailer is labeled with its contents. We don’t really have any kind of allocation system unless food gets in short supply. When that happens, someone will be here to ration the food. That’s just a brief overview of what we have here.”

“Thank you for showing me around, April. I’ll just get a few things for supper and Linc and I can come by another time and do our shopping.”

◦

“Know anything about landmines, Lincoln?”

“Deployment or removal? Call me Linc, please.”

“Deployment.”

“I’ve put in a few minefields in my day.”

“We have M-14s, M-16s and M-19s stored. We haven’t done anything with them because no one here had any experience, except Gunny.”

“You have some M-18s, now. They were in my trailer.”

“That’s right, Tom. Maybe Sergeant Washington can do something to secure the dome better.”

“Linc, the acreage started out as a 40-acre plot. We’ve cut additional timber and have a total of 60-acres cleared. Manny added that storage area across the road for our trailers that we use for central stores. What I’d like to do is secure the area up at the road and allow us to expand from here in an easterly direction.”

“How many mines do you have?”

“2½ semi loads, 60% of them are APMs.”

“Do you have a good map of the area?”

“I’m not sure. I have the aerial photo the Air Force took, thanks to Jack. I may have a CD with topo maps, but I’d have to check.”

“I can look into it tomorrow, fellas and let you know what I think.”

“We have the electricity and plumbing connected to that new trailer,” Sam announced. “It is leveled and ready to occupy.”

“Damn, that was quick.”

“I sent my wife over to meet your wife, Linc. She probably gave her a bit of a tour.”

“It has been a long day for me, fellas. If it is ok with you, I’ll go home, and have supper.”

“0800 in the morning, Linc. I’m going to add you to my Security staff,” Jim announced.

“See you tomorrow.”

“What’s for supper, Selma?”

“Pork chops, mashed and gravy. These folks have quite the setup. After supper, we can go to central stores and fill our cupboards.”